

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 3219

S E C R E T MANAMA 904

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : MASS, BA

SUBJECT : MIDDLE EAST FORCE AND SECURITY ASSISTANCE

REF : STATE 169515

1. APPRECIATE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE FOLLOWING COMMENTS ON
WHAT BAHRAINIS ARE UP TO, WHY, AND WHAT IT MIGHT COST.

2. IN MY VIEW LITTLE IN REGIONAL OR ARAB WORLD SITUATION
RELEVANT TO MIDDLE EAST FORCE QUESTION HAS CHANGED SINCE
LAST SUMMER. THERE NEVER WAS PERSUASIVE REGIONAL PRESSURE
ON GOB TO MAKE NAVY LEAVE. PRIME MINISTER NOW FIGURES HE
COULD EXTEND NAVY PRESENCE WITHOUT PUBLIC SUPPORT FROM
SAUDI ARABIA OR IRAN IF HE HAS SUFFICIENT MILITARY ASSIS-
TANCE TO SHOW FOR IT AT HOME. AS TO TIMING OF ANY APPROACH
TO GOB, HOWEVER, I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO SEE GOB MAKING ANY DECISION
ON THIS ISSUE WHILE ARAB WORLD IS IN CURRENT DISARRAY
AND HENCE FEEL NEGOTIATIONS LIKELY TO DRAG ON FOR A NUMBER
OF MONTHS IN ANY EVENT.

3. THERE IS NO QUESTION FOREIGN MINISTER AND OTHER CABINET
MEMBERS WILL DO THE BIDDING OF AMIR AND PRIME MINISTER IF
ORDERED IN CABINET TO DO SO. BUT THAT IS NOT THE WAY THE
SYSTEM WORKDS HERE WHERE PRIME MINISTER TENDS TO SEEK CON-
SENSUS RATHER THAN GIVING ORDERS. PROBLEM IS THAT LAST YEAR
AMIR AND PRIME MINISTER "IN CABINET" WERE PERSUADED CONTINUED
NAVY PRESENCE WAS NOT IN BAHRAIN'S NET INTEREST. A YEAR

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LATER PRIME MINISTER FEELS LESS PRESSURE FROM DOMESTIC

CRITICS OF NAVY PRESENCE SINCE THEY HAVE NO FORUM WITH ANATIONAL ASSEMBLY DISSOLVED AND HE OBVIOUSLY FEELS CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM CROWN PRINCE TO ACQUIRE MODERN WEAPONRY FOR WHICH CABINET IS LOATH TO PAY. HENCE PRIME MINISTER'S PLOY IS TO KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE BY PERSUADING CABINET TO LET NAVY REMAIN AS MEANS OF OBTAINING U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE. SINCE MOST OF CABINET APPEARS UNENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT BOTH KEEPING THE NAVY AND MODERNIZING THE DEFENSE FORCE, I THINK WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO OFFER GOB A PRETTY SWEET DEAL, ESPECIALLY IF WE ARE TALKING ABOUT EXTENSION OF MORE THAN A YEAR.

4. WE HAVE REPORTED WHAT PRIME MINISTER AND CROWN PRINCE HAVE SAID THEY WANTED IN THE WAY OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE. PRIME MINISTER SPOKE OF HELICOPTER FORCE, SOMETHING "MORE THAN A COAST GUARD BUT LESS THAN A NAVY" AND MODERNIZATION OF ARMOR AND LIGHT ARTILLERY. CROWN PRINCE THREW IN A JET FIGHTER SQUADRON. AS DEPT. WILL RECALL IN 1974 PRIME MINISTER HAD EXPRESSED INTEREST IN TOW AND BDF HAD ASKED ABOUT BUYING HAWK, TOW, AND RED EYE. IN SHORT THE APPETITE WILL BE LIMITED ONLY BY OUR ABILITY TO CONTROL EXTENT OF OUR COMMITMENT AND THE SLOW-MOVING DIGESTIVE SYSTEM OF THE BDF.

5. ASSUMING USG DECIDES IT IS WORTHWHILE TRYING TO KEEP MIDDLE EAST FORCE HERE PAST 1977, IT WOULD SEEM IMPERATIVE THAT WE DETERMINE CLEARLY IN OUR OWN MINDS WHETHER WE ARE SEEKING A LIMITED ONE OR TWO YEAR EXTENSION OR AN INDEFINITE ONE.

6. IF IT IS A YEAR OR TWO THAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT, WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO MAKE A DEAL LIMITED IN NATURE AND GENERALLY CONSISTENT WITH LOWER GULF ARMS POLICY. WHILE I DO NOT THINK PLOY OF MY "PERSONEL" SUGGESTION THAT GOB EXTEND DEADLINE A YEAR AS FIRST STEP WILL WORK, I THINK WE OUGHT TO LET IT PERCOLATE A WHILE AS WE PROCEED WITH HELICOPTER SURVEY. WHEN BY AROUND SEPTEMBER WE KNOW THE ORDER OF MAGNITUDE AND COST OF BDF'S HELICOPTER SCHEME, AND WHEN PRIME MINISTER IS AGAIN FREE TO FOCUS ON THIS PROBLEM AFTER SUMMER VACATION AND OFFICIAL VISIT TO AUSTRALIA, WE COULD EXPLORE ONE OR TWO YEAR EXTENSION MIDDLE EAST FORCE DEADLINE IN RETURN FOR OUR HELPING GOB FINANCE HELICOPTER WING. POSSIBLY SOME COMBINATUON OF FMS CREDITS AND INCREASED NAVY
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RENT MIGHT SWING THIS. WE MIGHT ALSO HAVE TO GET INTO MODERNIZING BDF ARMOR.

7. TO NEGOTIATE EXTENSION OF MORE THAN A YEAR OR TWO, HOWEVER, I AM STILL PERSUADED WE WILL NEED TO MAKE EXTENSIVE MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMITMENT COVERING MOST IF NOT ALL OF THE MODERNIZATION SCHEMES MENTIONED PARA 4.

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